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A Critical Examination of the Social Contagion Image of Collective Behavior: the Case of the Enfield Monster*

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This paper makes an initial statement regarding the conceptual and empirical utility of the social contagion image as posited by Blumer and Klapp. Their position is then criticized on the basis of its assumption that unverified and unusual sensory experiences, mobilization processes, and mass preoccupations are equivalent and undifferentiated products of social contagion. Further, the social contagion approach is unable to adequately account for differential participation in these collective behavior events. Most of these problems stem from the assumed discontinuity between collective and institutional behavior embodied in the social contagion perspective. An alternative approach is posited which suggests that communication processes, availability of the population for participation, and institutional demands provide a more adequate explanation of differential participation with respect to unusual sensory experiences, mobilization, and mass preoccupation. A case study of a monster sighting in a rural community is presented and examined from this alternate perspective.

The aftermath of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, religious revivals, financial panics and mass preoccupations have been recurring topics in the collective behavior literature. We will use Blumer's (1939) term "social contagion" to refer to this class of phenomena throughout this study.

Our discussion will be addressed to the following questions:

1. How accurate is the social contagion image of behavior?
2. How theoretically sound are social contagion explanations of behavior?
3. What alternative foci can be employed to further our understanding of events which traditionally have been studied from the social contagion perspective?

The Social Contagion Image

The social contagion image of behavior includes the assumption that under certain conditions, widespread masses of people rapidly and unanimously adopt patterns of behavior that are intense, unwitting and non-rational (Blumer, 1939:230). Putatively descriptive accounts of events, such as the eighteenth century "tulip mania" in Holland, are cited as evidence for this assertion (cf. Lang and Lang, 1961:88-92; Turner and Killian, 1972:12; Klapp, 1972:113-36).

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Critical examination of the quantitative literature, however, tends to undercut the social contagion characterization of behavior. The proportion of those in the available population who adopt patterns of behavior described as "social contagion" ranges from less than one third (Moss and McEvedy, 1967) to less than one percent (Johnson, 1945). Cantril's (1940) classic study of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast presents evidence that most fright reactions occurred during the first half of the broadcast and were of momentary duration. When the routine activities of the majority of the population become disrupted or held in abeyance, it is often the result of the intervention of institutionalized authorities. For example, disgruntled managers temporarily evacuated a factory when one fifth of the workers became upset (Kerckhoff and Back, 1968). In such instances, it is the directives of authorities, rather than "social contagion" which enlarges the scope of the event.

Social Contagion: Theoretical Frameworks

Blumer's (1939) statement has become a classic in the field of collective behavior, and is referenced in most discussions of the contagion perspective. Klapp's (1972) recent statement is more elaborate than Blumer's and is an attempt theoretically to tie social contagion to systemic structural strains.

Blumer's Position. Blumer uses the term "social contagion" in two contexts. In one context, social contagion is both a *feature of behavior,* i.e., ". . .the rapid. . .dissemination of mood, impulse, or form of conduct" (1939:230) and a compelling *force which lowers self-consciousness* and ". . .attracts and infects individuals" (1939:231). That is, social contagion is a behavioral manifestation of lowered self-consciousness, which in turn, produces lowered self consciousness. Blumer attempts to resolve this circularity when he asserts that under conditions of close physical proximity and "milling," the "interpretive phase of the act" deteriorates, and interaction assumes a more elementary, or circular nature. Circular reaction increases the intensity of behavior and gives rise to behavior which is not based on the adherence to common understanding or rules (1939:224-5).

Blumer shifts contexts when he cites crazes, manias, and fads as examples of social contagion. The problem created by this shift involves the notion that circular reaction is produced under conditions of close physical proximity and immediate sensory contact. The fads, manias and crazes cited by Blumer frequently involve dispersed individuals and small groups. The connection between circular reaction and diffuse phases of collective behavior is, we feel, tenuous.

Klapp's Position. Klapp connects social contagion directly to larger theories of social action rather than immediate sensory stimulation, e.g., circular reaction. Klapp's position can be summarized in the following three premises:

1. Social contagion arises from tensions within individuals. The greater the amount of tension generated by systemic strain, the greater the likelihood that social contagion will occur (1972:160);

2. Tensions inside individuals make them more vulnerable to suggestions (1972:115, 137); and

3. The substantive features of social contagion depend on people's pre-existing sensitivities or attitudes (1972:145).

Regarding the first premise, while societal tensions may be causally prior to such outbursts, evidence to this effect generally has been offered in retrospect, thus raising the possibility of post hoc fallacies. Further, similar conceptualizations have not allowed us to predict the magnitude of events such as urban disorders (Spilerman, 1976).

With respect to the second premise, vulnerability to suggestion has been a recurring assumption in most discussions of collective behavior. The "suggestibility" characterization is problematic in that people routinely comply with the directives of others as they go about their daily activity (McPhail and Rigney, 1973). Near unanimous and continuous compliance with directives, e.g., a company of soldiers executing a series of commands, occurs more frequently in carefully constructed and controlled institutional settings than in crowds (Couch, 1968:311).

Under conditions of social contagion, people are alleged to be temporarily quite willing to accept and act upon unverified information which is being transmitted outside institutionalized channels (Shibutani, 1966:95-128). Even in routine settings, however, the continuous and immediate verification of information often is impossible, or, at best, impractical. Information, when verified, is usually verified with respect to later events, *after* that information has been acted upon. In critical situations people may have no other alternative but to act on the basis of unverified information. Action on the basis of unverified information, even if the information may seem outlandish, is more a product of the exigencies of the situation than of "heightened suggestibility".

Regarding the third premise, consideration must be given to predispositional explanations of behavior. Participation in events constituting social contagions may involve movement to the location of the event, shouting, throwing things, standing about, or calling police (McPhail, 1971). To account for such rapid behavioral variation across time, in terms of hypothesized configurations of predispositions, lends much more explanatory power to predispositions than is warranted. Support for this theoretical stance is obtained from McPhail's (1971) reanalysis of "riot participation" data. Only seven percent of 215 separate tests of predispositional variables and riot participation yielded correlations greater than $r = .30$, and only one percent were of a magnitude greater than $r = .60$. With such negligible empirical support, we must conclude that individual predispositions are not sufficient to account for the substantive features of behavior which typically have been viewed as constituting social contagion.

In summary, social contagion is a vaguely defined variable, employed all too casually when "unique" events arise. What social contagion theory attempts to explain is seldom, if ever, observed. Existing theoretical statements of how social contagion comes into being are weak. We concur with Turner's

(1964:126) suggestion that careful observation of crowds more often reveals that the condition of homogeneity and unanimity is, in fact, an illusion.

An Alternate Approach. Behavior during social contagions has been characterized as homogeneous and undifferentiated. Engendered in this characterization is the failure to differentiate theoretically and empirically among the following phenomena:

1. Unverified and unusual sensory experiences reported by a very small portion of the available population (e.g., discovering windshield damage, Medalia and Larsen, 1958; sighting prowlers, Johnson, 1945).

2. Mobilization processes with respect to the objects established by the unverified reports (e.g., the formation of citizen groups to apprehend prowlers, Johnson, 1945).

3. Mass preoccupations—the rapid and widespread dissemination of information and the belief or disbelief of that information (Medalia and Larsen, 1958; Kerckhoff and Back, 1968).

A monster sighting in Enfield, Illinois in 1973 evidenced these phenomena. The basis for an alternate approach is provided by these theoretical distinctions which will be employed in discussion and analysis of the Enfield incident.

The Enfield Monster: A Chronology of Events

On Thursday, April 26, 1973, the *Carmi Times* (Carmi, Illinois) published an account provided by a resident of the nearby town of Enfield (pop. 760) describing a face-to-face encounter with a "weird creature."[1] The informant, Mr. M., stated that about 9:00 p.m. the previous evening he had heard scratching at his front door. When Mr. M. opened the door to investigate he confronted a creature ". . . about five feet tall, with a flat body, grayish in color, . . . with a strange appearing head at least twelve inches across." The creature was further described as having ". . . three legs and two pink eyes the size of flashlight lenses." Mr. M. reported that he fired a pistol at the visitor which then ". . . hissed like a wildcat. . .," bounded away from the house, ran northward through some brush and out of sight along the railroad tracks near his house. The account also noted that Mrs. M. telephoned the state police who responded promptly and claimed to have discovered some unusual animal tracks near Mr. M.'s house. During this early evening disturbance, approximately 50-75 residents of Enfield converged near Mr. M.'s home, and discussed the event.

In addition to this newspaper coverage, the news director of radio station WWKI, Kokomo, Indiana had been dispatched to Enfield. The radio station broadcast their reporter's statement that at least three other residents of

[1]With the assistance of the editor of the *Carmi Times*, (circulation of 5,000) we obtained copies of all their articles relating to the monster sightings. In addition, we sampled major newspapers in the state to obtain wire service releases concerning the event. While the format of these releases varied slightly, the essential content and wording of these articles remained consistent in both UPI and AP reports.

Enfield had seen "something strange." Among those residents was a ten-year-old boy (who lived near Mr. M.'s house) who claimed that about an hour prior to Mr. M.'s sighting of the creature, it had "jumped out of some bushes, stomped on his feet and had torn his tennis shoes to shreds." Newspaper accounts reported that the boy ran to his house "in hysteria."

By Friday, April 27, stories of the Enfield monster had been released to both AP and UPI News services and were being printed in newspapers throughout the state. For example, the Champaign-Urbana *News Gazette* carried an article about the incident which stated that the investigating officers had described Mr. M. as a "rational and sober" person. The article quoted the officers' description of the creature's tracks as being "shaped like a dog's, but having six toe pads." The article also noted that school children had told Mr. M. that they had seen a similar creature near the school ballpark. The article concluded with Mr. M.'s statement that there was probably more than one creature, and that "they were not from this planet."

By Monday, April 30, the *Carmi Times* reported that Mr. M. had received approximately 250 telephone calls since the 26th, including a call from a "government representative" who told him that the incident was similar to others occurring since 1967, and that these incidents had been associated with UFO sightings. Monday's article noted that during the weekend, an anthropologist had interviewed Mr. M., examined the tracks of the creature, and had pronounced them as definitely *not* the tracks of a kangaroo. In addition, plaster casts of the tracks had been sent to an undisclosed laboratory for "closer examination," and two local hunters had engaged in a weekend search for the creature. The article concluded by suggesting that a bear was wandering about the Enfield area.

From Tuesday, May 1, until Saturday, May 5, there was minimal media discussion of the Enfield incident. Renewed interest was generated, however, when on Sunday, May 6, Mr. M. reported to radio station WWKI (Kokomo) that he had again sighted the creature at 3:00 a.m. on the railroad tracks near his house. Later that Sunday, WWKI's news director and three of his companions revisited Enfield. This search party reported that they had observed an "ape-like" creature standing in an abandoned barn near Mr. M.'s house. They claimed to have recorded some vocalizations of the creature and fired a shot at it before it ran off.

By Monday morning, May 7, the events at Enfield were again on the wire service network. Mr. M. was interviewed by Wally Phillips of radio station WGN, Chicago and this telephone interview was broadcast live throughout the midwest. By Monday evening, stories of the Enfield incident were being cited in newspapers throughout the state, e.g., in the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Moline Dispatch*, Champaign-Urbana *Courier* and the Alton *Telegraph*.

Tuesday, May 8, the White County law enforcement officers arrested five young men from outlying communities after Enfield residents complained of gun fire. The men stated that after hearing radio reports about the monster, they had come to Enfield to photograph the creature. They brought shotguns and rifles with them for "protection" and claimed to have sighted a creature

and fired at it. The hunters were charged with violating hunting regulations, fined and released.

Wednesday, May 9, accounts of the arrests appeared in many Illinois newspapers. The *Carmi Times* accompanied descriptions of the arrests with statements from Enfield residents expressing fears that monster hunters might shoot people by accident. It was also suggested that many of the "experts" visiting Enfield to examine tracks and gather other facts were "no more anthropologists than [were] any [of the] local citizens." The article concluded by noting that local newspeople and law enforcement agencies continue to receive telephone calls from various publications, television and radio stations.

On Thursday morning, May 10, our research team, consisting of five people, arrived and began to conduct interviews throughout Enfield and outlying communities. The following Sunday, a graduate student in anthropology from the University of Illinois arrived in Enfield. Later that day, UPI releases quoted this student as suggesting that in all likelihood, the Enfield monster was a wild ape, such animals having been reported sporadically throughout the Mississippi watershed since 1941.

Monday morning, May 14, Wally Phillips of WGN contacted us by phone to inquire about our investigation. In the interview (which was broadcast live) we did not speculate as to the identity of the monster, but we did note the potential danger that "monster hunters" posed for local residents.

By Tuesday, Mary 15, almost three weeks since the first monster sighting, and a week after the arrest of the five monster hunters, the *Carmi Times* included two items: one discussed the building of a calf pen by an Enfield resident who, in response to his neighbor's inquiries, claimed he was constructing a "monster pen". The other item reported that an Ohio resident was offering a $500 reward for information as to the whereabouts of her kangaroo, missing for over a year. The Ohio woman was sure that the Enfield monster was her pet kangaroo. The Enfield incident ended on these whimsical notes.

The Enfield Monster: Methods of Investigation

The gathering of information while events were fresh in the minds of Enfield residents necessitated celerity. Procedures were employed which would allow triangulation of alternative sources and methods of data gathering. These procedures combined face-to-face interviews, employing both structured schedules and semi-structured, tape recorded interviews, and newspaper articles; all of which were used to reconstruct and analyze the events surrounding the monster sightings.

Enfield's ecology exhibited the typical midwestern rural crossroad, market center pattern of settlement (Chitambar, 1973:138), enabling us easily to subdivide the community into sampling quadrants. Probability sampling was not used. Rather, a community influential-reputational approach (Hunter, 1963) was used to select our first respondents (N = 14), which included the local postmaster, managers of the local recreation center, the diner/service station,

general store, and the high school principal and teachers. Such respondents, represent traditional clearinghouses of information in small rural communities, and additionally, occupy public positions that enable them to observe and report on the pervasiveness, intensity, and content of discussion about topics of local concern. Other respondents, (N = 73), were then selected on the basis of availability from the four sampling quadrants. Proportionately more respondents were selected from the quadrant in which the sightings took place.

The Enfield Monster: An Analysis

The Enfield monster sightings evidenced "classic" features of social contagion: (a) unverified and unusual sensory experiences, (b) mobilization processes, and (c) mass preoccupations. As noted, the social contagion orientation has failed to theoretically and empirically differentiate these phenomena. These distinctions provide a basis for assessing people's differential involvement across the time frame of the event, how the event grows (and recedes) in scope, and the event's impact on institutionalized patterns of behavior. In large measure, this approach follows from McPhail's (1971) discussion of civil disorders and McPhail and Miller's (1973) analysis of assembling processes.

Unverified and Unusual Sensory Experiences

Social contagion explanations have been utilized following episodes wherein ordinary people report unusual sensory experiences, but most official investigators (e.g., law enforcement officers or medical examiners) debunk, or at least provide no additional verification of these experiences. These investigators usually are acting with respect to immediate, practical problems (e.g., re-establishing work routines or domestic tranquility) rather than gathering data for sociologists. When the findings of the these investigators are employed as the primary means of ascertaining the "hysterical" nature of the reported experience, social contagion explanations may be rendered suspect. For example, Johnson (1945) reported that the Mattoon police received approximately seventy telephone reports of prowlers during the week of the "hysteria." The conclusion that there were no reasonable grounds for these calls is reached primarily because the police did not apprehend any prowlers. Johnson does not indicate that systematic attempts were made to ascertain the particular sequences of events, nor the possible sights and sounds that lead various people to call the police. Such an investigation might have led to the conclusion that many of the calls were made under "reasonable" circumstances.

In our investigation of the Enfield event, we attempted to determine the number of monster sighting reports at issue. The number of these reports was considerably smaller than one would assume from journalistic accounts of the event. A portion of the "reports" were simply Mr. M.'s claim that others in his community had seen monsters. One report turned out to be an ill-advised practical joke, i.e., the boy's report that the monster tore his shoes. Our interview with the boy and his parents disclosed that they invented the "shoe

tearing'' episode to ''tease'' their eccentric neighbor and to have some fun with an out of town newsman.

The White County Sheriff told us that the five hunters who were arrested on May 8 were in various stages of intoxication and had alluded to the monster in the context of being arrested on charges of out of season hunting and improper use of weapons within the city limits.

Of the several monster reports discussed, only Mr. M.'s firsthand reports and the May 6 report of the WWKI party were made by people who, in all likelihood, thought that they ''saw something.'' These three events hardly constitute a ''social contagion'' of monster sightings.

Mobilization Processes

The convergence of people toward, or dispersal from, scenes of unverified and unusual sensory experiences, the formation of vigilante groups and the gathering and subsequent movements of celebrating or hostile throngs of people have been cited as evidence of social contagion. These mobilization processes frequently consist of, or at least preceded by, *assembling processes* wherein people are notified of an event that is transpiring at some alternate location and subsequently they converge upon that location. A facilitating condition for the initiation of assembling processes is a large number of people in general proximity to one another, with a period of unscheduled or uncommitted time at their disposal. These time frames generally correspond to early evening, or ''after work'' hours, weekends, and holidays.[2] For example, the first monster sighting occurred about 9:30 p.m. and was accompanied by pistol shots and the arrival of state police vehicles. Subsequently, about 50-75 neighbors gathered at the site of the disturbance. In contrast, no assembling processes accompanied Mr. M.'s second monster report. This event occurred at a less opportune time (3:00 a.m.), no pistol shots were fired, nor were state police vehicles dispatched.

Increasing distance from the location of an event decreases sensory access to cues that something is occurring. Persons who can neither see nor hear the event are dependent upon others for instructions, face-to-face communications, phone calls, or mass media announcements, to establish the existence of the event or to specify movement toward (or away from) the event location. Newspaper stories and radio dispatches appraised persons throughout Illinois and parts of Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, and Kentucky of happenings at Enfield.

An issue that must be addressed is how such extensive notification of the event is produced. In this instance, notification of the event was facilitated by Mr. M.'s active pursuit of newspeople. For example, following the second

[2]We suggest that the availability of persons is a critical factor in determining the scope and temporal features of collective behavior events. McPhail and Miller (1973, 726) note that a majority of the disorders examined by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968) began and/or ''peaked out'' on weekends and evenings when the majority of people were free from the competing claims of work obligations and commitments. In addition, we suggest that authorities produced such availability when they closed schools, businesses and places of employment in ''incipient'' riot areas. While the availability of persons is a critical factor, it has not received the systematic attention warranted by its apparent importance.

sighting, Mr. M. called an Indiana radio station rather than the state police. Further, Enfield events may have been given play in the media because the monster stories provided substantive contrast to other, more ominous issues. Late April and early May of 1973 was a particularly gloomy period for people in southern Illinois. Severe flooding was seriously delaying spring planting, the Vietnam War was still to be resolved, the economy was beginning to slide into a recession, and Watergate disclosures were beginning to surface. Editors and station managers may have welcomed these monster stories for their contrast to an unusually long and depressing series of events.

Once people throughout Illinois and adjoining states had been informed of the Enfield events, mobilization processes occurred across this larger area. In general, most of these mobilization processes occurred on weekends (April 27-29, May 4-6) and/or involved people who were relatively unencumbered by immediate commitments. For example, one of the five hunters arrested May 8 was on military leave, and the others were unemployed.

While mobilization processes previously have been acknowledged only to the extent that they evidence social contagion, we suggest an alternative interpretation. Temporal variations and participation in mobilization processes can be accounted for with reference to processes of *notification of the event and differential availability,* i.e., people's differential access to periods of negotiable, or uncommitted time within which participation in mobilization processes can be scheduled.

Mass Preoccupations

Face-to-face and electronically mediated communication systems can disseminate vast amounts of information—fiction, trivia, and important news—to large numbers of people in short periods of time.[3] Given the existence of such effective communication systems in the United States, it is problematic to view the rapid and widespread dissemination of reports of events as a distinctive feature of social contagion. Rather, the rapid and widespread dissemination of information is a pervasive feature of contemporary social life.

The social contagion framework has been used to account for the dissemination of reports of unusual and unverified events and the belief or disbelief of these reports (e.g., Medalia and Larsen, 1958). The news of past or pending events and their location may "sensitize" or otherwise orient people with respect to such events (e.g., "A state police car just parked in front of Harry's house"). Such necessary information does not constitute sufficient conditions for the organization of innovative or disruptive activities. At a minimum, additional *specifications of action* such as those prescribing movements toward the location of the event (e.g., "Let's go see what is happening") must occur before activities are organized with respect to these events (McPhail and Miller, 1973:724).

[3]It is difficult empirically to assess the capacity of this communication network. Sheatsley and Feldman (1964) determined that virtually all (99.8 percent) of the people residing in the United States heard of the assassination of President Kennedy within six hours of the assassination. One half of these people heard of the event by word of mouth, the other half by radio, television, telephone and newspapers.

The social contagion approach gives attention to the dissemination of information, but has failed to acknowledge whether, or examine how, this information is used to construct activity divergent from the usual. Residents of Enfield seemed to be well appraised of recent happenings in their vicinity. Their frequent discussions of these events, however were restricted to casual conversations, jokes and inconsequential bull sessions in homes, cafes, and other meeting places.

The only discussions we observed which disrupted usual kinds of activity were the interviews we conducted. Residents reported that because of their conversations, some young children were "afraid to go out at night," "became frightened by small noises," and "had bad dreams." One respondent said that after the hunters had been arrested, he instructed his children to stay away from the area near Mr. M.'s house, because they might be shot by "some fool."

In the studies cited throughout this paper, more attention has been given to the "belief" of information than the scope of attending disruptions of social behavior. In presenting an alternate approach to such events we posit that "belief" or "disbelief" of information may be quite inconsequential for immediate or subsequent activity. Of all our respondents, the White County Sheriff was perhaps the most vehement in his denial that a monster had been sighted. Yet because of the organizational position he occupied, his routine activities had been disrupted more than any other person we interviewed. He stated that the arrests and legal dealings with the hunters, telephone calls from newspapers across the nation, and incidental complaints from county residents had greatly hindered him and his staff in carrying out other duties. A key consideration in accounting for how routine activities are disrupted is not who believes information and who doesn't, but the preestablished, or institutionalized relationships between people.

Discussion

The social contagion orientation sets forth an undifferentiated view of social behavior by accepting the "illusion of unanimity" as social fact. Unverified and unusual sensory experiences, and the concomitant mobilization processes and mass preoccupations that accompany them, consistently have been treated as *equivalent* products of social contagion. Alternatively, we suggest that communication processes, availability of the population for participation, and institutional demands, result in differential participation in the event. These variables often are ignored in favor of more elaborate discussions that attempt to account for uniform states of aroused emotions.

Our analysis of a monster sighting in Enfield, Illinois illustrates the utility of this alternate approach when attempting to understand the dynamics of unusual events that typically have been cited as social contagions. This approach begins by ascertaining, from firsthand investigation, the general character of *differential participation* in this episode. In Enfield, only three instances of unusual and unverified sensory experience (monster sightings) had occurred. With respect to mobilization, respondents reported that approxi-

mately 50-75 people converged upon Mr. M.'s house *after* state troopers arrived. Less than ten persons actually mobilized for the purpose of hunting the monster. Regarding mass preoccupations, virtually everyone in the community discussed the event with friends and neighbors, at various time. In short, our data reveal that the type, as well as the extent of participation, varied considerably.

We did not interpret these events as evidence that everyone "took leave of their senses" or abandoned the forms of conduct that usually are employed in dealing with more familiar problems. The processes of notification of events that accompanied the monster reports were analogous to the sights, sounds, and media announcements that accompany street accidents, civil disorders, sports rallys, and public meetings. Mobilization processes tended to occur in the evenings or on weekends, and involved those who were relatively unencumbered by competing institutional demands. The pervasive, community-wide, discussion of monster events during this time frame did not preclude the continuation of most preestablished, or routine, behavior. The implication of this observation is that *notification of events* and *mobilization* are more likely to disrupt routine behavior than subsequent "mass preoccupations."

The occupants of institutionalized positions traditionally are approached by locals and outsiders to determine "what is happening" in a community. Consequently, monster sighting events created major problems of accommodation for local law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, similar "overload" problems frequently are encountered by police following disasters, spectacular crimes, or during presidential visits and holiday celebrations. An examination of formal procedures of communication seems more appropriate to this issue than the emotions allegedly generated by social contagions.

We acknowledge that peoples' behavior with respect to strange millennial movements, and reports of monsters, flying saucers, and flying saucer abductions traditionally have been assigned to the "back wards" of sociological investigation. When discussed, these events usually are casually attributed to the workings of social contagion. In contrast, we suggest that events of this order occur quite frequently, in all parts of the United States, and are constituted by processes common to other more familiar social phenomena. The analysis of these processes can be considered as legitimate sociological problems, whether they are transpiring in such diverse contexts as formalized work settings, or during monster sighting episodes. We concur with one of our reviewers who notes:

> To be wrong about collective behavior. . .is to be wrong about society as a whole. The study of such seemingly strange events as monster sightings is important, I think, precisely because such phenomena must cause us to examine more closely our assumptions about ordinary everyday life.

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